

St George's Church of England Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110424
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	288669
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Graham Lee

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Robert Luggar
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Hartt
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2001
School address	White Lion Road Amersham HP7 9HX
Telephone number	01494 762552
Fax number	01494 765615

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves a mixed area although there are significant pockets of both affluence and social and economic deprivation within its community. Most pupils are of White British origin and around one in five is from a minority ethnic background. A few of these are at the early stages of learning English. Attainment on entry is wide ranging but generally below average and many children start school with poor social and language skills. The school gained a Basic Skills Quality Mark in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school and is outstanding in some respects. Strong Christian values are at the heart of its work and contribute to a happy and caring atmosphere. The headteacher has led the school very successfully for a number of years and ensures that it works in close partnership with parents, the Church and a range of other agencies to provide outstanding care, guidance and support for children and their families. The school enjoys the overwhelming support of parents and one remarked, 'My children settled in amazingly quickly and the caring atmosphere in the school really made a difference'. Pupils feel safe and secure and thrive in this nurturing environment. They enjoy all that school has to offer and achieve well.

From generally below average starting points, pupils of all abilities make good progress to reach standards that are above average by the time they leave. More able pupils do well in reading and mathematics but not quite as well in writing. The school is addressing standards in writing with a range of strategies which are already resulting in better progress for these pupils. Pupils' good basic skills, coupled with very positive attitudes to learning, ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the world beyond.

Pupils achieve well because of good teaching, an interesting curriculum and good systems to track their progress. This ensures that any who are identified as at risk of underachieving are given the additional help they need. Vulnerable pupils, including those with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities, receive very good support which gives them confidence. Similarly, the few who are new to English are given intensive support which helps them to rapidly acquire the necessary language to make progress. Consequently, all groups of pupils achieve well. Children get off to a positive start in the Foundation Stage where good provision enables them to make good progress, particularly in their social development and communication skills. Whilst the outside area is used to promote children's physical development in the Foundation Stage it is not exploited fully enough to develop their skills and understanding in other areas of learning.

An outstanding feature of the curriculum for such a small school is the many enrichment opportunities, which considerably enhance pupils' personal development and enjoyment of their education. The range of physical activities contributes to pupils' extremely good understanding of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are proud of the strong contribution they are able to make to school life through the school council.

The headteacher is very ably supported by her senior teacher and has created a close knit and committed staff team who work very well together. They are very well supported by an effective governing body. Together they know the strengths of the school and the areas for development and are effective in bringing about improvements where necessary. Standards have risen since the last inspection and issues identified have been largely addressed, indicating that the school is well placed to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Develop the use of the outside area to support children's learning in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children begin school with a wide range of experiences but often with weak social skills and language development. In the Foundation Stage they make good progress and firm foundations are laid for future learning. By the time they move on to Year 1 standards are broadly average. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2 to reach above average standards in reading, mathematics and writing in national assessments, reflecting good achievement from their starting points. Whilst standards have been above average in reading and mathematics for some time, they are not as good in writing and have fluctuated considerably in recent years. The most able pupils, in particular, have not always done as well as they should. The school has had an intensive focus on writing, designed to give pupils more of a context for their work. This is resulting in improved progress but has not yet been reflected in higher standards. Pupils do well in science because of an emphasis on practical work which excites and interests them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well being, including the social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions, are outstanding. Their high levels of enjoyment of their education are shown in their very positive attitudes to learning. This was very evident when Reception children proudly showed their work to their equally proud parents in an assembly. Pupils behave well although some become distracted when they have been sitting for too long. Their attendance is satisfactory. Whilst most pupils attend regularly and on time, a few families are unresponsive to the school's best efforts in this area. Pupils feel safe because, as one put it, 'teachers protect us'. Their awareness of safety issues is also reflected in the way they behave in class and around the school. Pupils have an exceptionally good understanding of healthy eating and know, for example, that 'we need lots of fruit and vegetables because they are full of vitamins'. Even the youngest children displayed a good understanding of these issues as they played in the 'Queen of Hearts Cafand;eacute;' and undertook various activities related to a healthy living theme. In the playground, pupils support each other, making good use of the 'friendship bench'. They are very involved in the Church and local communities. They are very proud of their prize for the best float in the Amersham Carnival.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and ensure that pupils achieve well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour and plan very effectively to meet their needs. Teachers work very closely with a team of highly experienced and skilled teaching assistants who make a significant contribution to the quality of education. Teachers use a range of strategies to motivate pupils and to ensure that they are engaged in learning. For example, regular work with a partner and responses on individual whiteboards help teachers to check pupils' engagement and understanding. Interactive technology is often used very effectively to enhance learning although sometimes opportunities are missed to exploit it to the full. Occasionally, teachers keep pupils sitting for too long which results in a loss of focus for some.

Teachers mark pupils work regularly and also encourage pupils to reflect on their own work to see how it might be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. One of the things that pupils enjoy most about the school is the many opportunities they have to take part in additional activities as diverse as sports, art, computers and science. These help them to be creative and really enjoy their education. Visits, visitors and fruitful links with other organisations also enrich the curriculum considerably. For example, a strong partnership with a local healthcare company allows pupils to work in exciting ways with professional scientists. The curriculum provides very well for the development of pupils' basic skills and good support is given to those who are in need of additional challenge. For example, the most able pupils in Year 1 are helped to achieve as well as they can by joining Year 2 for literacy and numeracy. An emphasis on drama and the gathering of ideas is helping to motivate more able pupils to write although there are insufficient opportunities for them to write at length in different subjects. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support learning, for example, when Year 2 pupils used the internet confidently to research the life cycle of the butterfly. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is particularly effective in developing children's social and language skills although learning opportunities are restricted by insufficient use of the outside area.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

'When you first come to the school they really make you feel welcome', said one child, echoing the views of parents. The school's outstanding care of its children is underpinned by its supportive Christian ethos. One governor commented, 'This is a superb example of how faith and education can work together'. Consequently, pupils feel safe and secure and their personal development is outstanding. Vulnerable pupils are provided with effective support which enables them to make a success of their education. The school enjoys a fruitful partnership with parents and carers who are encouraged to support their children's learning through the Family Learning Programme for example. Robust systems are in place to follow pupils' progress and to identify challenging targets for improvement. Pupils are aware of their targets and say that they help them to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is a very effective leader who ensures that at St George's every child really does matter and is enabled to do well both socially and academically. Teamwork is at the heart of the school's work and expertise is pooled effectively for the benefit of pupils. Good strategies for monitoring have led to improvements in teaching and learning and have helped to raise achievement. The senior teacher provides very effective support and has taken the lead in many aspects of the school's development. Currently, the school is aware that responsibilities are concentrated too much in the hands of the headteacher and senior teacher because of the relative inexperience of other teaching staff. Governors are very enthusiastic and involved in the work of the school. They offer a good balance of support and challenge to school leaders.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

You may remember that I came to your school a little while ago to have a look at all the things you do. I am writing to thank you all for being so friendly and helpful. I really enjoyed talking to you about your school. I thought you might like to know what I found out.

You and your parents are right to be proud of the school because it is a good school. You told me that you like being at school because teachers help to make learning fun and there are lots of exciting things for you to do. I really enjoyed the assembly! You children in the Early Years were really proud of the things you had done. Most of you work hard in lessons and your behaviour is good. Well done! You also told me that your teachers and other staff look after you really well and that you all feel safe. You also know a lot about how to stay fit and healthy.

You are doing well in school because teachers give you work that is interesting and helps you to get better. They also check up all the time to make sure that you are doing well. The school is very good at helping those of you who find things a bit harder. This means that you are all ready to go on to junior school and do well.

The headteacher has led the school very well for quite a few years. She gets a lot of help from all the other staff. They are always looking to make the school even better for you. I have asked them to do a couple of things that I think might help. They are doing a lot to help some of you to get better with your writing. I want them to keep this up especially for those of you who are doing well in reading and mathematics but not quite as well in writing. I have also asked them to make more use of the outdoor areas in Early Years to help with your learning. Best of luck to you all.

Yours truly

Graham LeeLead Inspector